

Master of Puppets

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Summary: "You may leave, if you wish. However, I do have another request for you." He stepped over the dead man in front of him, moving closer to her. "If you're interested. It's a high risk job." He smirked. "Fatter payout." Shiho's eyes narrowed slightly. "I'm listening."

1. Chapter 1

****A/N: ****So here I am, rewatching Naruto Shippuden from literally episode one, and I'm watching the scene where Kankuro is fighting Sasori to try and get Gaara back, and I come up with a story idea. The cover for this story is, in fact, Shiho. Is it possible to control humans like puppets? Who knows? It's fiction! Enjoy. Also, image is courtesy of [rinmarugames . com](http://rinmarugames.com). That's where I made her.

* * *

><p>"What's a sweet looking girl like you doing in a dirty place like this?"<p>

The boisterous laughter and easygoing conversations settled into silence suddenly. She blinked once but didn't turn around to look at the man standing behind her. His voice was loud and obnoxious, gruff from many years of being far too noisy. She could feel him shift from one foot to the other as he waited for a response she didn't plan on giving him. His impatience made her fingers twitch in anticipation for battle. She craved it, especially today.

Needless to say, it hadn't been a very good day.

"You gonna answer me, sweetie?"

She shifted slightly in her seat and reached for her drink. The rim of her cup had barely touched her lips when it was suddenly knocked from her hand. It flew across the small room and shattered against

the wall, splashing sake in every direction. She took a deep breath in an attempt to calm her frantic heartbeat and twisted slowly in her seat until she was facing the man. He wasn't much to look at. He stood no taller than perhaps five foot nine, and his dark hair was cropped short. He had scars crisscrossing up his arms, marring what would have otherwise been nice skin. His eyes were small and dark. His smirk was unkind.

His eyes widened slightly when he finally got a full view of her. True, she was small, but her expression alone usually kept anyone from approaching her. The girl's eyes were big and round like a child's, but they were cool and calculating, and as white snow. She had a deep scar beginning just above her right eyebrow that continued down over her nose and just under her left eye. Her hair was a pale green color, wild and untamed, with a slender braid trailing down over her shoulder as white as her eyes. She looked feral.

"What's your name, sweetie?"

Her lips twitched up in the hint of a smile. It was not kind.
"Shiho."

"Well, Shiho, I asked you a question." His smirk deepened and he leaned forward, pressing his hands against the table on either side of her, caging her in. Her expression remained unchanged.

"I'm here for you."

His grin widened for a moment like he believed he'd won, until she shifted again and raised her hand, curling her fingers. He shouted in surprise as his body twisted away from her and crumpled to the ground. Shiho stood, keeping her one hand raised as she reached behind her with her other hand, unsheathing her katana. She stepped lightly over his fallen body and pressed the edge of her blade against his throat, wondering for a brief moment if she really should kill this man where he lay.

"I'm not feeling very merciful today." She sighed, tracing lines against his skin with the tip of her sword. She watched with mild interest as tears poured out of his eyes, making tracks through the dirt on his face. Shiho grimaced in disgust and twitched her fingers up. His body spasmed and rolled until his face was pressed into the dirt floor at a painful looking angle. She nudged him with her foot and heaved another sigh. "In fact, I'm not really feeling much of anything at all."

With those last words, she plunged her sword into his back, directly over his heart.

* * *

><p>Shiho grunted as she let the man fall from her shoulder into a crumpled heap on the stone floor. She glanced down at her arm and grimaced at the sight of the blood that had soaked into her shirt, then looked back up to the group of well-dressed men and women in front of her. A man stepped forward and nudged the body at his feet with his foot, a sneer twisting his mouth down. Shiho straightened as his gaze moved to her and sized her up. He nodded once and flicked his fingers in her direction, signalling for the woman standing beside him to finish out the deal. She scurried forward and presented a

small case to Shiho, bowing before taking a step back.<p>

Shiho opened the case, peering down at the money inside. Satisfied, she closed it and inclined her head towards the man. "Thank you."

"You're the best of the best." The man answered with a cruel smile. "I pay with the knowledge you'll run back to me at the snap of my fingers. I fancy myself a generous man."

"Of course." Shiho bowed slightly in response. "If you'll excuse me now though, I would like to leave."

"You are free to do so. However, I do have another request for you." He stepped over the dead man in front of him, moving closer to her. "If you're interested. It's a high risk job." He smirked. "Fatter payout."

Shiho's eyes narrowed slightly. "I'm listening."

2. Chapter 2

Shiho looked up at the sky, shielding her eyes from the sun with her hand, squinting against the bright light. She sighed and looked around at her surroundings. There were trees everywhere, and it was insanely hot. She preferred the desert, where the heat was intense, but it was dry, and the open terrain allowed her to see for miles. Here, surrounded by trees with the sun beating down on her after a brief thunderstorm, the air suffocated her and visibility was all but dropped down to zero. She was a sitting duck here.

She pushed her hair back out of her face, huffing irritably when it flopped down into her eyes once more. Shiho stomped over to a nearby tree and plopped down, settling against the trunk. She pulled her map out of her pocket and rummaged around in her bag until she found an apple. Using a handful of pebbles, she smoothed out her map as best as she could and scattered the small rocks around the corners in an attempt to keep it from flying away. She took a bite of her apple and examined the map as she chewed, mostly searching for a path out of the forest that still led her in the right direction.

"This is ridiculous." Shiho muttered, tossing the apple core over her shoulder and untying her scarf from around her neck. "I almost regret taking the job."

She looked up suddenly and glanced around, mentally scolding herself. Talking to herself out loud wasn't a good habit for a bounty hunter to have, but she'd done it ever since she was little. It wasn't like she'd had many friends. Shiho definitely wasn't much of a people person. She snorted and shook her head, casting her eyes back towards the map. She couldn't make friends easily, that was true, but she had no problem getting people to do whatever she wanted them to. She could be very convincing.

"Well I should probably get going." Shiho pushed the pebbles aside, but before she could pick up the map, a sudden gust of wind ripped it off the ground. It swirled up into the air and got caught in an insanely tall tree. Shiho shrieked in outrage as she stood, glaring up at the map. There was absolutely no way she was going to be able

to get that down.

"Fuck!" She shouted, stomping her foot, letting her anger consume her. She rarely let herself get emotionally riled up, but couldn't help herself. She was hot and sweaty and completely out of her element. She was going to be walking into enemy territory very soon. "_Fuck!_"

"What are you screaming about?"

Shiho whirled around to face a group of teenagers. There were two boys and a girl. The smallest boy stood at the front of the group. He had red hair and sea foam green eyes. There were bruise-like rings around his eyes, like he'd never slept a day in his life, and a scar above his left eyebrow. Her rage diminished as soon as she looked at him, her eyes going wide. Could it possibly be so easy? The girl standing behind the small boy shifted uneasily under Shiho's gaze, but the boy seemed mostly at ease, with only brief glances at the smaller boy in front of him.

"My map." Shiho said lamely, schooling her shocked expression into one of her many masks. She smiled sheepishly and gestured at the crumbled paper tangled in the branches above. "It got caught in the breeze and I can't get it."

"Couldn't you just jump?" The girl spoke up, raising an eyebrow.

Shiho looked genuinely confused. "Jump?"

The older boy, the one with purple paint on his face, sighed loudly and stepped around the smaller boy. He positioned himself in front of the tree and then leaped suddenly, grabbing one of the lower branches and swinging himself up. He launched himself from branch to branch until he was near the top where the branches started thinning. The boy eased himself carefully onto the branch just below the map and stretched his arm out for it, shifting his footing every now and then.

"Be careful, Kankuro. Those branches are thin and you're heavy."

"Shut up!"

The girl sniggered, her mask of concern evaporating. Shiho watched in amazement as he snagged the map from the tree and jumped from the branch, landing nimbly on the balls of his feet. He straightened and handed the map to her, smiling slightly. "Jump."

"Oh!" She folded the map and slid it back into her pocket. "You all are shinobi, aren't you?"

"I'm going to assume you aren't." The one named Kankuro responded, sizing her up. "You look like one though. What village are you from? I don't see a symbol."

Shiho frowned. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"A symbol!" Kankuro tapped the little metal plate on his hat, looking irritated. "The symbol for the village you come from. You are here

for the Chuunin exams, right?"

"Uh, yes." Shiho nodded. "Yeah, I'm here for the exams. I'm from the Hidden Sound village." She really wasn't, though she might as well be. The man she took most of her jobs from lived there, and that's where she made her living. "I got robbed about a day ago and it was in my bag. I'm not used to this kind of heat so I took it off for while."

Kankuro raised an eyebrow. "Okay, sure. What's your name?"

"Shiho." She answered a little too quickly, pulling at a loose thread on her scarf. "What about you?"

"I'm Kankuro." He gestured to the two behind him. "This is my brother, Gaara, and my sister, Temari."

Shiho nodded, her eyes focusing on Gaara again. He was looking at her too, focused with an intent that actually made her shiver. It was an odd feeling that she wasn't used to. Her employer had warned her about this boy. He was supposedly freakishly strong and emotionally volatile. Entirely unpredictable. He looked fine then, if a little irritated. She had been warned not to attack impulsively. So Shiho had decided to find him and monitor him before making her move. She'd never dreamed it could be so easy.

"It's nice to meet you." Shiho bowed slightly. "Also, I would like to thank you for retrieving my map. I'll admit I wouldn't have been able to do what you did."

"A shinobi that can't even climb trees. No wonder you were robbed." Temari snorted, rolling her eyes. "Easy pickings."

Shiho turned her gaze to the girl. "You're right. I'm working on that. Everything I know I've learned on my own." She turned her attention to Kankuro. "If you don't mind, can I walk with you to the Hidden Leaf?"

Kankuro turned to glance at his sister. "Uh, sure. Just..." He frowned, turning back to look at her. "Never mind. Let's go."

End
file.